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Research

Colonial Conflicts and the Carolina-Chickasaw Connection

By Charles Cobb

In May 1736, a mixed force of Indians, Africans, and Europeans under the command of French Governor Bienville attacked the Chickasaw village of Ackia. The ill-conceived and unsuccessful uphill assault on the well-fortified town led to heavy casualties among the French-led troops and a long retreat back to Mobile. Today, the former town of Ackia lies under



Figure 1: The modern setting of the battle of Ackia. (SCIAA photo)

the backyards of a neighborhood on the south side of Tupelo, Mississippi (Fig. 1).

In December of 2011, SCIAA archaeologists joined Dr. Brad Lieb, archaeologist with the Chickasaw Nation, on a project to relocate and redefine the main points of the battlefield. The work was funded by the National Park Service Battlefield Protection Program. It represents one of several such grants received by SCIAA archaeologists, who have examined several pivotal battles and campaigns such as Sherman's march through South Carolina (Steve Smith) and the protracted naval conflict around Charleston (Jim Spirek). Our interests have been drawn to Mississippi because the Chickasaw were strong allies of the Carolina colony, and they established several settlements along the Savannah River. Long distance ties between Carolina and the Chickasaw heartland were viewed by leaders in Charleston and London as an important alliance

against the growing colony of French Louisiana.

Our work consisted of metal detector survey and the occasional excavation of small shovel-test pits (Fig. 2). Because our field investigations were largely in lawns, we were anxious to keep our ground disturbance to a minimum. The neighborhood homeowners were extremely gracious in allowing us permission to dig in their yards, and were very enthusiastic about our study since the battle is well-known locally.

The results of our work were somewhat mixed. French surveyors managed to create detailed maps of the surrounding topography and of the location of Chickasaw settlements. This information, along with prior archaeological research in the area, helped us to readily identify the general location of Ackia and other nearby Chickasaw settlements. As might be expected, though, there has been considerable disturbance to the ridge top as the land was prepared for housing construction in the 1970s. Nevertheless, we were able to identify several pockets of well-preserved landscape in the locality along with a wide



Fig. 2: Metal detecting for artifacts. (From left to right): Tom Pertierra, Steve Smith, and Brad Lieb. (SCIAA photo)



Fig. 3: Example of recovered artifacts. Top: Lead shot and mold for making shot. Bottom: brass "tinkler," a clothing ornament made from rolled brass or copper. (SCIAA photo)

array of artifacts from Ackia and nearby villages (Fig. 3).

The elevated landform where the main defensive structure of Ackia was located is still visible today. Also, one can follow the slope where the French led their ill-advised attack. So the general physical contours of the conflict still remain.

SCIAA archaeologists will return in March 2012 to examine the battle of Ogoula Tchetoka. The assault on Ackia was the southern part of a two-pronged pincer movement on the large cluster of Chickasaw villages in the region. Another French-led force from Canada attacked the town of Ogoula Tchetoka to the north two months before the Ackia battle, and with even more disastrous results. The French setbacks led to a reprieve for the Chickasaw, although the French continued to maintain constant pressure until they forfeited their North American possessions at the close of the French and Indian War in 1763.

We are grateful to the Chickasaw Nation for their support and for the opportunity to renew the Carolina alliance. In addition, we would like to extend our gratitude to the many residents of Tupelo who opened their private yards for our research, and to the local volunteers and supporters who facilitated our stay and field work. We are anxious to return!